



# HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

12:30 PM

Sullivan Chamber  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

**The Health and Environment Committee will hold a public hearing to review and discuss the update to the Cambridge Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP) Annual Report.**

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Health and Environment Committee was held on Tuesday, October 22, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 12:30 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Nolan. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation. This public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2nd Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

**At the request of the Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.**

- Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote
- Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Siddiqui – Present/Remote
- Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote
- Councillor Wilson – Absent

**Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.**

The Chair, Councillor Nolan noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss the update of the Cambridge Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP) Annual Report. Present at the meeting from the Office of Sustainability was Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Climate Initiatives, Julie Wormser, Chief Climate Officer, Nikhil Nadkarni, Senior Climate Project Manager, and Thomas O’Neil, Sustainability Planner. Jennifer Ballew, Sustainability Project Planner was joined via Zoom. Also present from the Climate Committee was Mallorie Barber, Chair, Stephen Nutter, Vice Chair, and David Rabkin, member. Also present in the Sullivan Chamber was Councillor Zusy.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered opening remarks and read, not verbatim, from the following statement.

We hold this meeting every year to monitor yearly progress on emissions reductions for buildings, which account for the majority of emissions pollution in Cambridge. The NZAP has appropriately been renamed NZAP for buildings. This annual report gives the City Council and the community an opportunity to monitor progress and stay involved. This annual accounting is to monitor progress, reprioritize different programs and initiatives, and understand our overall roadmap to carbon neutrality. And since buildings account for approximately 80% of emission pollution in the citywide emissions, this report is critical.

Per the Net Zero Task Force in 5-year update (2020 done, accepted in 2023):

“To achieve even more aggressive action, the City should continue to monitor and pursue emerging opportunities and technologies to accelerate GHG emission reductions and adapt the Net Zero Action Plan appropriately on a regular basis. The stakeholders represented by Task Force members can help achieve this innovation through peer learning activities, and state and federal government should be engaged to advance the enabling policies and resources needed to achieve decarbonization of buildings at the local level. The Task Force also recommends centralizing GHG emission reductions as a priority across City administrative, decision-making and budgeting activities, including City Boards and Committees.”

So we need to be thinking about all of our actions as a city through this lens of the Net Zero Action Plan and need to find ways to incorporate emissions reductions. Each year the Climate Committee, our citizen-led body, is charged with reviewing our progress on climate goals, including NZAP. Their latest review letter in the packet for today’s meeting and I have invited the chair of the Climate Committee, Mallorie Barber, to present their letter and go over their specific recommendations. I learned that the city has not responded to the letter in a formal way and I have asked that there be a response - it is respectful and good governance to do so.

It is the Council’s role to monitor and oversee progress on goals set to address the climate crisis and reduce our emission pollution citywide.

A key principle of the Net Zero Action Plan was to continuously monitor and adapt to changes related to GHG emission reductions in buildings. Climate change is accelerating, the new federal government will hamper a lot of progress, and so we need to push now more than ever and ensure that our actions are commensurate with our goals. 2025 marks the beginning of the next 5-year evaluation of the Net Zero Action Plan. Plan was originally adopted in 2015, last 5-year update was delayed due to covid but was started in 2021 and officially adopted in 2023.

The results of the first 5-year review were sobering and troubling. Per the graph I have included in the packet and can put up on the screen, the report included in the last 5-year review determined that:

“[Any] declines that have been achieved have largely been offset by recent economic growth and new construction. Similar to what has been found on the global scale, the effects of the actions taken to date are too small to achieve the city’s goals. We expect greater emissions reductions as more impactful actions are implemented, including the low carbon energy supply and BEUDO performance enhancement requirements; however, over the next 10 years, emissions need to be reduced 240,000 – 290,000 MTCO<sub>2e</sub> just to align with the 2°C Paris Agreement limit—an almost 20x increase over the initial five-year period. The city needs to remain aggressive in its approach and find additional ways to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The next five-year period will be critical. If the current trend continues and emissions remain flat, meeting the targets set by the Paris Agreement for 2030 will become much more difficult, and significant adjustments in strategy will be needed to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.”

So now we will go to the staff presentation, and following that presentation we will go to the Climate Committee chair, Mallorie Barber, and then public comment, followed by council discussion.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered a brief overview of data received from the NZAP 5-year review. Councillor Nolan provided this information ahead of the meeting and it was included in the Agenda Packet.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized the team from the Office of Sustainability who gave a presentation titled “Net Zero Action Plan”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered an overview of the NZAP, fiscal year review, equity and resilience indicators, and next steps.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Mallorie Barber and members of the Climate Committee who reviewed the Climate Committee’s FY24 review of the NZAP and recommendations on the Plan’s implementation. This letter, which was submitted to the City Manager on January 9, 2025, was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

**The Chair, Councillor Nolan opened public comment.**

Susan Redlick offered comments that were in favor of the NZAP and encouraged more public support.

Helen Walker offered comments, suggestions, and concerns related to the NZAP.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Julie Wormser who responded to concerns that were raised during public comment and provided a brief overview of how the Office of Sustainability is working to address those challenges. In addition, Julie Wormser shared how important it is for Cambridge to be innovative and progressive while creating policies and being a leader in climate change.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan shared excitement regarding upcoming news that will be shared related to BEUDO. Susanne Rasmussen noted that in April there will be a very comprehensive report that will be issued to coincide with the launch of Sustainable Cambridge, and the report will include a wide range of data. Councillor Nolan pointed out that the last report with BEUDO benchmarks was data from 2020.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked if there was a process on how to measure whether buildings in Cambridge are contributing to lower emissions in other communities and if there has been a rise in people relocating their residency or businesses to Cambridge because of the contributions being made to lower emissions. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler highlighted how important it is to look at the larger picture now that the Multifamily Zoning Ordinance has been passed. He pointed out how it can contribute to reducing emissions by giving more opportunities for people to work and live in the City. Susanne Rasmussen responded by sharing that it is hard to understand the actual impact on other communities and that there is no direct way to measure that. Susanne Rasmussen added that the State's Green Communities program is an opportunity for municipalities to provide data on municipal operations emissions. Nikhil Nadkarni added that at a State level, transportation is the biggest sector of emissions state wide, and that the State's goal is to try and get people out of fossil fuel motor vehicles and use a more sustainable form of transportation. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler explained how important it is for climate work to be recognized in all areas of sustainability, and how they interact with each other.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Siddiqui who asked for more information on the D.O.E. Grant. Nikhil Nadkarni shared that the D.O.E. Grant was awarded to the City and has been conditionally obligated, noting that the funding will be used towards the D.O.E. Boston and Cambridge Coalition. Nikhil Nadkarni added that they are currently waiting to hear what the next steps are going forward.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who raised concerns about embodied carbon emissions that could coincide with the tearing down of buildings now that the Multifamily Housing Ordinance has been passed. Councillor Zusy asked if funding from the Grant will help to assist residents financially with energy retrofits and if there are concerns with government funding because of decisions being made in Washington D.C. Julie Wormser explained that there are unknowns with funding right now if Congress has already appropriated it. In addition, Julie Wormser provided examples of how the City is enhancing communication with property owners to make it easier to find services that are already offered, while also incorporating equity in decision making. Councillor Zusy asked how the Office of Sustainability is supporting the Cambridge Community Center, with it being a resiliency hub. Councillor Zusy also offered comments on thermal energy and asked if it would be possible financially to do a geothermal study. Susanne Rasmussen pointed out that thermal energy networks are big infrastructure projects that come with many challenges and provided a brief overview of what would go into a project that large. Susanne Rasmussen explained the relationship with the Community Center, noting that they have been supporting them by applying for grants on their behalf. Councillor Zusy asked who will be overseeing the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Susan Rasmussen shared how the plan was prepared and highlighted staff involvement, as well as the efforts made by the Consulting Group. Julie Wormser provided additional information on how the Office of Sustainability is planning and preparing to address hazards, such as hiring a Hazard Resilience team leader.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan emphasized the importance of having smart goals and highlighted the benefits of reaching 100% renewable electricity by working towards reducing electricity emission pollution and ending the burning of fossil fuels. Councillor Nolan added that the Net Zero Action Plan for Transportation will also play a

huge role in lowering emissions and how an upcoming feasibility study will assist with addressing ways to be fiscally responsible. Councillor Nolan asked how the Sustainability team is working towards addressing emission reduction with large commercial buildings and labs. Susanne Rasmussen responded by providing an update on phases the large laboratory buildings are in, noting they will be at net zero in 2035, and shared the timeline and trajectory as BEUDO continues to go forward. Councillor Nolan asked if it would be helpful to create a reporting system for buildings that are not subject to BEUDO but are subject to state law. Susanne Rasmussen noted that it is something that should be considered and explained how it would be beneficial but it would also have some challenges. Councillor Nolan shared that she would be in favor of another reporting system because it would give the City more access to consistent data.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who shared challenges she faced when adding insulation to her home during renovations and noted how there are some spaces in her house where the insulation did not go in, causing areas to be cold. Councillor Zusy asked if there was an option for the City to have an infrared gun to assist residents with similar problems. Councillor Nolan pointed out that it was a service the City used to offer. Julie Wormser added that it is important to locate insulation gaps and air leaks to address some of these challenges and shared that Mass Save may be able to assist with similar services.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Julie Wormser who highlighted how important the City Council's work has been to create mandates that are needed to move forward. In addition, Julie Wormser thanked the Climate Committee for all their work.

**The Chair, Councillor Nolan made a motion to adjourn the meeting.**

**Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll**

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Siddiqui – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Wilson – Absent

**Yes – 4, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.**

**The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:30p.m.**

**Attachment A – Communication from the public**

**Clerk's Note:** The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. The video for this meeting can be viewed at:

[https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/955?view\\_id=1&redirect=true](https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/955?view_id=1&redirect=true)

**A communication was received from Councillor Nolan, transmitting data from Selections from NZAP 5-year Review.**

**A communication was received from Nikhil Nadkarni, Senior Climate Program Manager, transmitting a presentation on the Net Zero Action Plan.**

**A communication was received from Councillor Nolan, transmitting the 01/09/25 Climate Committee FY24 Review of the Net Zero Action Plan.**

**Erwin, Nicole**

Attachment A

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**From:** Nancy Pendergast <pendergast.nancy@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, February 10, 2025 7:24 PM  
**To:** City Council; City Clerk  
**Subject:** Net Zero Action Plan

To the Council- I am writing about tomorrow's Net Zero Action Plan Report. I appreciate Councilor Nolan's efforts to monitor the yearly progress of emission reductions. The City worked hard to develop the plan, it is important to maintain momentum in this moment.

With the current administration gutting all things helpful to the environment, local folk are required to step up.

Thank You,

Nancy Pendergast  
48 Harvey St  
350 Cambridge Somerville